

# The American Protestant Missions In China, 1860–1899

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## INTRODUCTION

For nineteen hundred years the Lord's commandment has been in the process of fulfillment: "Ye shall be my witnesses...unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Christ left to His Church the task of taking the Gospel to every nation.<sup>1</sup> The Church, the body of Christ, has a missionary obligation as the instrument of Christ. As Christ is sent by the Father, the Church is sent by Christ (John 20: 21). In obedience to the Great Commission, the Church has the continuing responsibility to send missionaries to all parts of the world (Matt. 28: 18–20, Acts 13: 1–4).

In any period of church history, the strength or weakness of Christianity corresponds to the extent of missionary service of the Church in that period.<sup>2</sup> Missionary work is not an accidental phenomenon which now and then presents itself in the history of Christianity; it belongs to the very essence of the Church.<sup>3</sup> The study of missions then is essential to the study of church history.

Christianity is a faith which is missionary by its very nature. The exclusive claims of Christianity make it missionary (I Cor. 8: 4, Acts 4: 12). If Christianity is a religion and Christ is a savior, there is no obligation to others. If Christianity is the *only* true religion and Christ the *only* Savior, how can the Christian not take to the world the only message that offers salvation? (Romans 1: 14, 15)

Christianity's view of mankind also makes it missionary (Romans 3 : 23). Man is basically sinful, corrupt by nature, and condemned to death. No man can free himself from sin. The Christian who has the message of the way provided by God through Christ cannot remain indifferent to the need of mankind to be free and to be saved.<sup>4</sup>

There are many qualities that make Christianity unique among the religions of the world, but the basic difference is that "religion is man seeking God, but the gospel is God seeking man."<sup>5</sup> Any study of Christianity, therefore, must include the concept of missions.

The nineteenth century has been named the great century of Christianity, and the period from 1800 to 1914 has come to be known as the age of Christian missions. During this time Christianity spread to all areas of the world, but the Church was confronted by the greatest challenges in the course of its history. The missionary movement of the nineteenth century, which marked the beginning of modern missions, was a reflection of the Church's response to these challenges. While the Church responded by revitalizing itself, realizing its purpose, and taking up its task of evangelism, the ways by which this was carried out were often colored by the ideas of the culture to which the Church was reacting. The extent to which the missionary was a carrier of western civilization was dependent on several factors ; the extent to which Christianity represented western culture, the objectives of the missionary, and the degree to which he had been prejudged as a symbol of westernization.

Kenneth Scott Latourette, a great missionary historian who was a missionary himself, has pointed out that Christianity is not the Gospel ; it is a partial expression of the Gospel. Christianity is a religion, and like other religions it is molded by its environment and reflects to some degree the age, the social, economic, intellectual, and political conditions in which it is set. As with all religions Christianity owes its distinctiveness in part to the cultural heritage with which it has interacted and of which it is the vehicle. Because of its historical background and development, Christianity is associated predominantly with the Occidental stream of culture. In taking Christianity to all parts of the world the missionary must be a carrier of western culture, though he is primarily a carrier of the Gospel. The missionary brings with him as much a foreign religion as a universal Gospel to the non-Christian world.<sup>5a</sup>

This brings us to consideration of the objectives of missions. Since it is impossible to take Christianity, completely separate from the ideals and customs of the West, to the non-Christian world where there is cultural and religious resistance to it, the missionaries of the nineteenth century as they did in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have introduced Christianity through back door or under disguise. They have become involved in a host of activities such as establishing Western style schools where they taught Christian morality, founding hospitals and medical stations where they inculcated human dignity, and publishing magazines and newspapers through which they propagated democratic principles. These activities were secondary to the primary objective of proclaiming the Gospel, but they as a means of bringing new members into the body of Christ were necessary for extending the Church.

In doing so, the missionaries, knowingly or unknowingly, undermined the ideals and mores of a non-Christian country, or interfered local jurisdiction and challenged the authority of the ruling class as happened in nineteenth century China. In China, the Christian missionary personified the Western threat to Chinese tradition. To the Chinese, Christianity has always been a foreign and heterodox religion and has been admitted only with reluctance or has been forced upon them under humiliating conditions.<sup>6</sup> In this context the Chinese in the nineteenth century were unable to "appraise Christianity as a separate entity. As he considered the merits and demerits of Christianity, each Chinese wore glasses tinted by China's experience with the West since the Opium War and by his concept of his own and China's needs."<sup>7</sup>

Looking Christianity through colored glasses and with their own needs, the Chinese, particularly the scholar-gentry class, showed remarkable hostility, reinforced by China's strong anti-Christian tradition,<sup>8</sup> toward Christian missions that represented Western civilization. Confronted with obstacles and restrictions erected by Chinese authorities, missionaries "were often quick to seek the support of their home government in guaranteeing their 'right' to propagate the gospel."<sup>9</sup> This reliance upon force and coercion reinforced the Chinese belief that Christian missionary enterprise was "the cultural arm of western imperialism" or "the political agent of western expansionism". The belief was largely shared by educated Chinese.<sup>10</sup>

Encountered with Chinese resistance, that was to transform into the anti-Christian Boxer Rebellion of 1900, Christian missions, partly influenced by the social gospel movement, were compelled to examine their goals and methods in their evangelical work. Until 1880 missionaries had the slightest doubt of their goals and methods in Christianizing China. As Arthur H. Smith, a missionary of thirty years' residence in China, portrayed the Chinese as pagans misled from the path of eternal salvation by their own false religions and as men lacking "Character and Conscience." "What China needs is righteousness," he declared, "and in order to attain it, it is absolutely necessary that she have a knowledge of God and new conception of man, as well as of the relation of man to God. She needs a new life in every individual soul, in the family, and in society. The manifold needs of China we find, then, to be a single imperative need. It will be met permanently, completely, only by Christian civilization."<sup>11</sup> Griffith John, a great evangelist in central China, proclaimed in 1877 that the goal of Protestant missions was "to do battle with the powers of darkness, to save men from sin and conquer China for Christ."<sup>12</sup> Though well-intentioned in their motives, they were prefaced by one unalterable assumption: superiority of Christianity and western morality. Dedicated to the self-sacrificing task of helping Chinese from sin, Protestant missionaries, who were often fundamentalists believed in the doctrine of "Elect," looked the Chinese with paternalism and found hard for them to accept China and the "Chinaman" as equals.

In the closing two decades of the nineteenth century, missionaries were casting about for new definitions of their goals and techniques. They came to the conclusion that the conversion of China must be accompanied by the Christianization, i. e. Westernization, of Chinese civilization and began to discover that there was a difference between being a Christian in a Christian country and being a Christian in a non-Christian land. One reaction to this comparative approach is to give greater emphasis to social service work such as founding schools, hospitals, and orphanages and organizing rural reconstruction projects and famine relief. As A.R. Kepler, who came to China early in the twentieth century as a representative of the American Presbyterian Mission (North), argued that such welfare activities would demonstrate to Chinese the true spirit of Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

As missionaries became more and more involved through social work

activities in Christianizing Chinese society, they were so preoccupied with this secondary goals that they lost sight of their primary objective —— conversion of China to Christianity. Western scholars of missions now agree that missionaries to China were far less successful as evangelists of a Christian faith than as mediators of western culture and civilization.<sup>14</sup>

Despite Christians failed in their primary objective, missions must be credited with being consistent in their ministry, zealous in compassion, to extend Christianity to the “stranger beyond its gates.” Nonetheless, the missionary was an alien, haunted with a stigma as an instrument serving imperialism. Added to this taint was that he was the “white man”. Racism was real to both missionary and native when the former proselytized the latter.<sup>15</sup> The “Chinaman” was truly a being from another planet and was described in missionary writings and letters as the people judged not in the same moral terms.<sup>16</sup> The problem of Christianity as a religion of the West and the white people remained strong in the nineteenth century. The problem has been expressed by a Chinese Christian of the second generation. “No doubt the God that was revealed to my ancestors is also the God of the coloured people, but he is still white.”<sup>17</sup>

The purpose of this short essay for studying the Christian missions in China is neither to condemn nor to justify, but to evaluate their records. Examining their goals, methods, successes and failures, it is hoped to present a valid picture of missions, to have a realistic, practical awareness of the role of the missionary, and most importantly to develop a proper attitude toward non-Christian peoples and the responsibility of the Church to them in the light of the Great Commission.

For examining the subject, the study has been confined to the period of the latter half of the nineteenth century before the outbreak of the Boxer Rebellion of the anti-Christian movement in 1900.

## PROBLEMS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY EVANGELICAL CHURCH

Before proceeding an examination of the Christian missions in China, it is profitable to probe into problems facing the nineteenth century evangelical church.

The nineteenth century Church and the culture which they represented shaped the attitudes of both missionaries who took Christianity to non-

Christian lands and congregations who supported the mission. The missionary movement must be viewed in this light. The missionary was as much a product of his culture as the Chinese were inheritants of the Confucian ethical system.

Of all the branches of Christianity, Protestantism best represents the revival and spread of Christianity in the nineteenth century. The spread of the religion was proportionately more through Protestantism, and more important than the numerical count is the fact that the worldwide influence of Christianity upon the contemporary scene has been through Protestantism than any other forms of the Christian faith.<sup>18</sup> The study of nineteenth century Protestantism is especially applicable to that of Christian missions in China because the root of Christianity among non-Occidental peoples has proceeded furthest through the effort of Protestant missions. Less concerned with ecclesiastical structure than the Roman Catholic Church, they have been more successful in training as well as recruiting indigenous clergymen.<sup>19</sup>

Protestantism, as much as Roman Catholicism, has a quality of flexibility which enables it to adjust in form to non-Christian cultures, though the adaptation of form has been difficult to make without compromising to the point of losing the faith it professes. This is exactly what happened in the "Rites Controversy" in the eighteenth century when Jesuit Fathers in an attempt to appeal Christianity to Chinese compromised in the form of worship and invited severe criticism from rival orders of the Catholic Church. Early Jesuit Fathers were more successful as mathematicians and astronomers than as witnesses to the Christianization of China.

Protestantism as adapted to American purposes in the nineteenth century assumed an evangelical character and waged "ideological warfare" against the established ideas and institutions. With the emergence of America as an industrial nation confident of her manifest destiny and eager to carry its message to a non-Christian world, the Protestant Church in nineteenth century America adapted itself to the need of evangelicalism.

Nineteenth century evangelicalism was more than religious revivalism, proselytism, and sentimentalism; it was a reform movement to ills of late nineteenth century society permeated with depravities. The nineteenth century was a century of changes affecting all areas of society — economic, political, social, intellectual, and religious. Old ideas, attitudes and

assumptions were openly challenged under the impact of the scientific and industrial revolutions. Man began to see himself in a new way, in relation to his environment, to fellow men and to God. The old order was being torn down and man was developing new ideas to build a new order.

The scientific revolution brought a new outlook of self sufficiency and progress. Through newly realized natural laws man felt competent to understand and to control the universe. Christianity was challenged for man no longer saw a need for God to order the affairs of the world. Nor did he need a savior, as the "noble savage" replaced the sinful nature of man. "Christianity was not designed for an indifferent mechanical universe but for a highly personalized world operated continuously by an anthropomorphic God."<sup>20</sup> Science seemed to discredit the basic beliefs of Christianity. To the disruption of settled ideas by the scientific revolution, the industrial revolution added strong forces of social disturbance. Christianity's promise of eternal life seemed irrelevant in the age of increasing materialism. The wealth and comfort made available in this life by the machine age made eternal values seem remote.

The social ills which were a part of industrialization presented a complex problem to evangelicals by the mid century, which led to major changes in Protestantism. The nineteenth century presented a hard road for Christianity, as it inherited the growing religious apathy of eighteenth century rationalism. Christianity was regarded as out-of-style and the church was seen as a hindrance to progress characteristic of the nineteenth century. The threats to Christianity did not cease with the nineteenth century, but in fact became more open. Evangelical Protestantism, however, responded to the challenges of the changing world which threatened to destroy Christianity. The forward surge of Christianity profoundly influenced other phases of life and culture. During the first half of the century, evangelicalism gained in popularity, especially among the well-to-do, to the point that it became convention. Later, it was revitalized by revivals of the Second Awakening, especially evidenced by the evangelism at the mid century of Dwight Moody.<sup>21</sup> These revivals led to the deepening of the spiritual life of believers and the conversion of great numbers.

The evangelicals stressed individual conversion, holy living, missions, and moral and social reforms. Through the efforts of British evangelicals the Church spread widely overseas partly by migration and partly by

missions. The expanding British Empire, too, facilitated the growth of missions that followed the Union Jack. After the first and second Opium Wars in mid nineteenth century China, Christianity spread rapidly under the protection of foreign governments at the treaty ports opened to the Western Powers. Although the Gospel was spread by a genuine zeal for the cause of Christ, it has been observed that "...British cause and the cause of heaven often become a little confused."<sup>22</sup> Evangelical Christianity had become accustomed to the idea that the cause of heaven and that of Britain were sometimes the same. American Christian missions followed the same footpath, but trailing merchants who were doing a lucrative trade with China.

In the United States revivals characterized by mass conversions became the normal way of winning the population to the Christian faith. The years between 1792 and 1842 saw continuous revival in the country. The field of evangelism was dominated by Charles G. Finney during the middle third of the nineteenth century, and by Moody during the last third. The following description is of the revival that occurred in America in the Protestant churches of almost all denominations in 1830-31 :

That was the greatest work of God and the greatest revival of religion that the world has ever seen, in so short a time. One hundred thousand were reported as having connected themselves with churches as a result of that great revival. This is unparalleled in the history of the church.<sup>23</sup>

From this picture of the church at home growing through mass conversion it is understandable that the missionary could expect to conquer the world for Christ in a lifetime. Evangelicals were concerned with individuals in their relationship to God. Theirs was a Gospel of personal salvation. Yet through revivals they achieved personal salvation of the masses. The objective was to bring about the conversion of mankind through the conversion of individuals.

The missionary then might well expect to go to the heathen offering a personal Gospel to individuals and why not to convert nations to Christianity. The revival character of Evangelical Protestantism emphasized the importance of the conversion of all men, with little thought for a provision for the need of spiritual growth. All efforts were given to this great task of conversion. In a foreign culture the missionary found that a great deal of



effort had to be given to teaching an understanding of what responsibilities as well as benefits the Gospel included. The new Christian in a foreign culture needed not only instruction and guidance in his new life, but help in understanding his role within his culture.

Stephen Neill points out that the majority of Protestant missionaries were not churchmen; the winning of souls filled their thoughts and the process of establishing the Church seemed to be a distant and not very important problem of the future.<sup>24</sup> The missionary went with the purpose of accomplishing his mission, but not with a very clear picture of how or at what point this would be achieved. Caught up in great enthusiasm for the task it was easy for the missionary to be lulled into a sense that things would go on just as they were.<sup>25</sup> Often missionaries failed to adequately prepare native Christians for the burdens they were destined to carry. The foreign missionary often set out to overcome evil, and to replace it with moral reform and holy living rather than to develop mature Christians. Reports and addresses from nineteenth century missionary conferences, sermons and lectures on missions picture the missionary as a messenger from heaven who has answered the call of Providence.<sup>26</sup> The Christian West felt that it had been chosen to answer the voices out of the wilderness of the heathen world. In a lecture on missions given at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1892, a missionary exhorted seminarians calling upon them that the Church must carry on "an aggressive campaign of world-wide activity and eventually of universal conquest and peaceful occupation."<sup>27</sup>

Protestant missions had become part of the age of progress, that had grown from the evolutionary theory of Darwin. At Princeton Seminary students heard that the message of foreign missions, the spirit of religious reformation in a worldwide sense, "...marks a distinct and significant advance in the evolution of redemptive purpose."<sup>28</sup> Missions to the heathen in pagan lands were too often expeditions sent forth in the spirit of sacrifice and conquest of the enemy. Indigenous faiths and ideals of life must be disrupted and destroyed and Christianity and the ideals of the West must be imposed upon the native people of China. The Chinese Christian Hsu Pao-ch'ien realized the wrong methodology with which the missionaries forced religion and culture down Chinese throat. The early Christian missionary seemed to have possessed "an imperfect conception of the Christian religion." "Christianity," he declared, "is a religion of love, which determines

not only its spirit and purpose but also its methods. A religion of love cannot be spread by the method of force.”<sup>29</sup>

Evangelical Christianity produced a crusading spirit anxious to fulfill the Great Commission carrying it to the end of the world. The missionary had a mandate from God to overcome the forces of evil and establish Christ’s authority over all the world. He spoke of the heathen as the enemy to be brought to submission, as J. Ohlinger, a member of the American Methodist Episcopal Mission, asserted at the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China held at Shanghai in 1890 as follows :

No one can fail to see, almost the moment he lands on these Asiatic shores, the urgent need of changing or abolishing the customs that hamper, torment and debase these heathen peoples. The missionary who can remain unmoved by the cruelty and wickedness of these customs has lost his divine call to the work...

The strength of the West, naked military power if necessary, could justifiably be used to make this conquest possible ; it was believed that it had been provided for that purpose.<sup>31</sup> Christians were firmly convinced that the divine and human resources available were sufficient to carry out the task of conquering the heathen successfully. Only divine resources could ensure the effectiveness of the human resources.

## CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN CHINA

The early Protestant missionary who went to China in the nineteenth century was imbued with the theology that “man found himself in a miserably sinful world where he was in rebellion against God. As a sinful creature he neither wished nor was capable of a reunion with God. He had been endowed with reason but reason was the slave of evil desire, pride, and blind human passion. Freedom came when God sent his son in human form into the world to point the way and to die on the cross so that men might be free from the world and achieve salvation.”<sup>32</sup> He had the slightest doubt of the theological doctrine of the release from the misery of sin and of regeneration with the grace of God, because it “rested on the divinely inspired and infallible Bible.”<sup>33</sup> Armed with the unflinching belief in the doctrine and with a burning fervor to win the heathen to Christ, come they

did to China accepting the task as his divinely ordained mission. It was an enormously difficult task as a human enterprise, perhaps, doomed to fail. Nonetheless, he was unshaken but his spirit was fortified with the conviction that the conversion of the Chinese to Christianity was God's command that must succeed in spite of all obstacles.

For all these claims for the universal validity of Christianity and for God's ordained task, the missionary had to rely upon the power represented in the foreign legation in Peking. So strong was China's long established tradition of anti-Christian feelings that they influenced on the attitude of the nineteenth century Chinese toward Christianity and the missionary. The anti-Christian tradition goes back as far as the early seventeenth century. The Chinese possessed a cultural antipathy toward heterodoxy that would threaten the orthodoxy of Confucian beliefs and practices. Christianity, when it was introduced to China in the late sixteenth century, was vilified and branded with the stigma of a heterodox religion. For its foreign origin, its fundamental non-adherence to Confucianism, and its suspected motives of political subversion, Christianity in its legal position was rarely secure, and it was subject to persecutions and was finally expelled out of the Empire, only to be re-introduced after China was defeated in the Opium War. Even if Christianity escaped the hostility of the government, it came under the "disapprobation of the Chinese author—official and non-official alike." Down through the centuries since the seventeenth century, Christianity like Buddhism earlier had been condemned as an antithesis to Confucian orthodoxy. The argument was based upon reason, proof for the doctrine of cause and effect, contradiction within Christianity to established authority, xenophobia, and so forth.<sup>34</sup>

This Chinese anti-Christian tradition had influenced upon, or had become the source of, the attitude of the Chinese in the nineteenth century, when imperial China in her twilight years became the prey of the Western powers that resorted to gunboat diplomacy in order to extract concessions from her. Following defeat in the Opium War, China under gunpoint concluded the "unequal" Treaty of Nanking in 1842 with Britain, supplemented with the Treaty of the Bogue in 1843. The latter granted Britain extraterritoriality in criminal cases and the most-favored-nation treatment.

After Britain had obtained these concessions from China the United States and France, through persuasion combined with the threat of physical

force, demanded and received the same or even larger concessions. The Sino-American Treaty of Wanghsia, July 1844, extended the principle of extra-territoriality to include civil as well as criminal cases and specified the right to maintain churches and hospitals in the five treaty ports (Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo, and Shanghai). and the most-favored-nation clause. France was given the right to build Roman Catholic missions at the treaty ports and the freedom to proselytize without interference from the Chinese government. Through the operation of the most-favored-nation clause, the new privileges were extended to the United States. Without firing a shot, the United States won the concession given to France with regard to missionary activities.

China fought war against Britain over the *Arrow* incident in 1856, and France joined in the war seizing the opportunity for the execution of a French missionary and some of his Chinese converts who were charged of having instigated a rebellion. China once more was coerced to sign humiliating treaties in 1858 and 1860 that ended the so-called Arrow War. The Treaty of Tientsin, 1858, incorporated the article guaranteeing the protection of missionaries and, by implication, Chinese Christians.

It is now a generally known fact that missionaries acting as interpreters for their governments rendered services for the advancement of Western imperialism when foreign governments negotiated these treaties with the Manchu government. Until 1880 missionaries like Rev. E. C. Bridgman, Rev. David Abeel, Rev. S. Wells Williams, Rev. Peter Parker, M. D. served interpreters and translators for the Legation of the United States in China and "actually transacted the greater part of the American official business with the representatives of the Chinese Government for nearly forty years."<sup>35</sup> For example, U. S. Minister Caleb Cushing was greatly indebted to Bridgman not only for his service as interpreter but also as adviser when Cushing negotiated the Treaty of Wanghia in 1844. Dr. Parker and Williams entered upon a distinguished service for the American legation on official and unofficial capacity contributing to the advancement of their government's national interests. The indispensable services of these missionaries, who held important posts in the consulates or in the legation in China maintaining actual contacts with the Chinese officials for their titular superiors, were recognized by United States Minister William B. Reed in 1858. Reporting to Secretary of State Lewis Cass, Reed wrote :

...I am bound to say further that the studies of the missionary and those connected with the missionary cause are essential to the interests of our country. Without them as interpreters the public business could not be transacted. I could not but for them have advanced one step in the discharge of my duties here, or read, or written, or understood one word of correspondence or treaty stipulations. With them there has been no difficulty or embarrassments.

It was the case also in 1844, when Mr. Cushing's interpreters and assistants in all their public duties were all from the same class ; in 1853, when Mr. Marshall, and in 1854 with Mr. McLane, Dr. Bridgman, who was the principal assistant in all these public duties, still lives in an active exercise of his usefulness ; and I am glad of the opportunity of expressing to him my thanks for the incidental assistance and constant and most valuable counsel...<sup>36</sup>

For the future development of missionary activities in China and troubles with Chinese, the Treaty of Tientsin in 1858 is important because it stipulated a guarantee of toleration of Christianity and a promise of protection, in the exercise of their faith, to missionaries, together with the privilege of the missionaries to travel freely all over China. In negotiating the American treaty of Tientsin, S. Wells Williams and Rev. W. A. P. Martin had their hands in it. Dr. Williams drew up an article providing 'full toleration for all persons professing Christianity, and permission for American missionaries to travel anywhere in the country, renting or buying houses or land, and living with their families.' Reed and Chinese officials objected for various reasons. Without the article, Williams insisted, the United States would get "less than had been secured in the Russian treaty [of Tientsin] which was already signed." Unsatisfied with half a loaf of bread, Williams persisted and persuaded Reed, who was anxious to consummate the task of signing the treaty, to hold off the consummation of his task scheduled on the following morning. In the morning Williams drafted an article which was acceptable to Reed. It left unspecified about locality where the missionaries might live and work, but inserted in a general term a provision for religious toleration within the Empire." It reads :

Article 29 — The principles of the Christian religion, as professed by the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, are recognized as teaching men to do good, and to do to others as they would have others do to them. Hereafter those who quietly profess and teach these doctrines shall not be harassed or

persecuted on account of their faith. Any person, whether citizen of the United States, or Chinese convert, who, according to these tenets, peaceably teaches and practises the principles of Christianity shall in no case be interfered with or molested.<sup>37</sup>

The article granted foreign missionaries the right to reside in the interior of China---one of the great sources of troubles between missionaries and local Chinese after 1860, and served the purpose of the merchants who demanded for further opening of the country to trade. Thus the missionary became an agent of diplomacy and commercial interest identifying itself with the national interests of the country of which he was a member. Chinese and Asians were quick to criticize the role of the Christian missions for the service of imperialism.

T'ang Liang-li, who made no pretext of his anti-Christian hostility, hurled a scathing criticism at the Christian missions indicting them with the charge that they were the political agents of Western imperialism. He accused them of providing "the West with the weapons to violate China's territorial integrity," having "either direct connections with the opium trade, like Robert Morrison and Charles Gutzlaff, or strongly advocated its introduction into China, like Wells Williams." In China's eyes the Western Powers and missionaries were all of a gang, but the latter had "done more harm to China" than any other group of foreigners. Summarizing his accusation, Tang delivered an indictment with a blanket charge of imperialism against the missionary.

It suffices to mention here that China's losses of her dependencies such as Annam and Tonkin, and the cession of Kiachow to Germany, of Port Arthur to Russia, of Weihaiwei to England, and of Kangchow Bay to France, and the Boxer reaction, bore a very close relation to missionary activities in the interior of China. That Christian missionary activities are the opening wedge for Western Imperialism is, therefore, a matter beyond dispute. Never has there been an attack by Imperialism on China that was not supported by the upholders of Christianity.<sup>38</sup>

The distinguished Indian scholar and statesman K. M. Panikkar criticized Christianity for having been "reduced to the position of a diplomatic interest of Western Powers in their aggression against China." "The missionaries were clothed with extra-territoriality and given the right to

appeal to their consuls and ministers in the 'reglious' interests of Chinese Christians. No greater disservice, as history was to show, could have been rendered by its proclaimed champions to the cause of the Church of Christ." Panikkar also accused the missions of having grown at the expense of Chinese humiliations, The churches received a considerable portion of "indemnities exacted from China after various wars." The missions were the recipients of benefit from the humiliations of China thus identifying "in the eyes of the Chinese with aggressions against their country."<sup>39</sup>

Few western historians of Asian affairs could disagree with Tang and Panikkar. Historians like Tyler Donnette and Kenneth Latourette, who enjoyed the impeccable reputation of objectivity, are in unison in the criticism of nineteenth century missionary records. The church "had become a partner in Western imperialism" and American missionaries were agents of a government which sought the disruption of China.<sup>40</sup>

Once missionaries had an access to China's interior accruing to the Treaty of Tientsin, they established themselves in the interior, acquired "perpetual leases" of land and buildings, sometimes in violation of local laws, and interfered in law suits on behalf of Chinese Christians. For the period of three and a half decades after 1860, the missionary was "often the source of great annoyance to the Chinese populace and to officialdom."<sup>41</sup> An examination of diplomatic correspondence from the legation of the United States in China to the State Department in the latter half of the nineteenth century reveals numerous cases of troubles involving missionaries with local Chinese residents and officials.

Space does not allow a detail study of these disputes that broke out in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Entanglements arose out of what local officials believed to be infringement upon the independent jurisdiction of China and a threat to the authority of the gentry-scholar class and to the established customs of the Chinese way.

No sooner the Treaty of Tientsin had become effective than missionaries went to the interior with a greater hope for the propagation of the Christian faith in order to bring a mass of the people into God's salvation. The field appeared to be promising and prospects for massive conversion looked hopeful, because their proselytizing activities had been confined to the treaty ports until 1858. As it was feared, confrontation of the two different religions and customs produced entanglements in the rural districts where

conservative Confucian Orthodoxy and xenophobia remained strong. The Legation of the United States in China reported a number of troubles in which American officials found it necessary to intervene on behalf of missionaries.<sup>42</sup> In most cases conflict entailing bodily assault upon missionaries and destruction of property occurred when local officials asserted the "right of the Chinese government to exercise exclusive jurisdiction over its own subjects" about which "the authorities were becoming more and more sensitive, especially in reference to missionary operations."<sup>43</sup> Indeed the primary responsibilities of American diplomatic officials in China were to take care of grievances of missionaries for representation to the Chinese imperial government. George F. Seward, upon assuming his office as the U. S. Minister in China in 1876, found that a majority of the complaints coming to his attention were those of citizens who were missionaries.<sup>44</sup> Upholding the twenty-ninth article of the Tientsin Treaty, Seward supported the right of American missionaries to "go into the interior to preach and to reside... [and] to displace existing religious system." In so doing they aroused antagonism and got entangled in difficulties. Assaults upon or murder of missionaries, mistreatment of converts, destruction of missionary property and buildings, or bureaucratic harassments, he said, would continue to occur "so long as the West is Christian and the East adheres to other systems." Nonetheless, Seward was regretful for the situation which established America's "political representation as the right of arm of the propagandists of the Christian faith."<sup>45</sup>

Seward's understanding of the missionary question was shared by his colleague in foreign service, Edward Lord. Addressing himself to the problem, Lord wrote a report to Seward on November 29, 1879 in which he criticized abuses by impatient missionaries and Chinese converts of their treaty rights. It said :

... [A]mong the missionaries are some who, exalting the importance of their office, arrogate to themselves as official status, and interfere so far as to transact business that ought properly to be dealt with by the Chinese local authorities ; while among their converts are some who looked upon their being Christians as protecting them from the consequences of breaking the laws of their own country, and refuse to observe the rules which are binding on their neighbors. This state of things China cannot tolerate or submit to. Chinese subjects, whether Christians or not, to be counted good subjects, must render an exact



obedience to the laws of China ; if any offend against those laws they must, one and all, Christians and non-Christians alike, submit to be dealt with by their own native authorities, and the foreign missionary cannot be permitted to usurp the right of shielding them from the consequences of their act.<sup>46</sup>

The missionary question also became a subject of debate in the House of Lords. Lord Clarendon said that missionaries were "a constant menace to British interests," and The Duke of Somerset, First Lord of the Admiralty, asked "What right have we to be trying to convert the Chinese in the middle of their country?" Sir Rutherford Alcock, British Minister to China from 1865 to 1871, advised British officials who looked on the missionaries with disfavor that "the cause of Christianity would be bettered if it did not have the support of foreign governments and if the missionaries would have more patience and moderation in pursuing their enterprise they would be viewed by the Chinese less as political instruments and agents of revolutionary propaganda and more as teachers of religion."<sup>47</sup>

The apprehensions of Seward, Lord, and Alcock, notwithstanding, missionaries were drawn into entanglement with local authorities and residents. Anti-Christian riots broke out in the province of Canton in September 1884 when the Christians "were unwilling to contribute money for the building and repairs of temples for the expenses of idol processions, plays, incense burning, and the like." Mobs attacked and destroyed mission chapels, looted the houses of the native Christians, threatened the native pastor with death, and left crops in ruin.<sup>48</sup>

Methodist Episcopal missionaries ran into trouble with a Chinese building contractor in February 1886 when the latter defaulted in a contract agreement. The missionaries held him to his agreement and refused to pay money, then the contractor ordered his men to bind one of the missionaries. Upon receiving the news of the incident, acting Consul-General Smithers requested an American admiral to dispatch man-of-war to Chin-Kiang. Upon being informed of the arrival of the ship, the local official arrested the Chinese offenders releasing the missionary from bondage.<sup>49</sup> What appeared to be a minor case of breach in contract agreement became a serious international issue entailing the dispatch of a war ship and was blown out of proportion with the decision of the diplomat who was all too quick to act disregarding the consequences.

The most serious riot occurred in Chungking, Szechuan Province, in July 1886 in which mobs, partly in response to an anti-Chinese riot in the Western coast of the United States, vented their hostility against American and British missions. They destroyed missionary buildings, and the damages were estimated at 28,000 taels. According to an official Chinese investigation, the riot broke out when the American Methodist Mission, established in Chungking in 1882, purchased land and constructed buildings in 1886 for permanent residency after having been assured by the local magistrates that they did not interfere with the *feng shui* (geomancy), which was not, however, in harmony with the public feelings.<sup>50</sup> The riot attributed to the *feng shui* was an after thought, Denby of the U.S. Legation in Peking charged, to cover up the failure of the local authorities "to furnish aid and protection which the treaties called for."<sup>51</sup> It took a round of negotiations for several months before the question of indemnity was settled in January 1887.

The Chungking affair is the case in point that, as the Chinese sees it, the missionaries were "held to have no right to take up permanent residence in the interior" where foreigners and their religion were not welcome and where the populace looked the missionaries with suspicion. Similar incidents occurred from time to time in the remainder of the century, more frequently in the 1890s.

The class of the Chinese who opposed the missionary with hostility was the gentry — the social class that derived the leisure to become educated, thus eligible for holding public offices and capable of exerting influence in village life. Their opposition was based upon what they understood to be the missionary's revolutionary program. The gentry-officials disliked the missionaries because of their teaching that not only disapproved Confucius but also advocated substitution for "the Chinese classics a study of the Bible, scientific training, a knowledge of Western history, and an education which would fit the student for dealing with modern problems. The status quo of the mandarin rested on the ancient civil service examination system, which made mastery of the Confucian classics the test for office. Quite naturally he resented the missionary who considered this ancient system of education quite useless. He also recognized, as few missionaries did, that to undermine the confidence of the Chinese people in the Confucian system was to undermine the basis of the whole Chinese social order."<sup>52</sup>

Because missionaries in the interior worked among the people of the lower classes that “presented the greatest danger of revolution, the mandarin became convinced that the missionaries posed a threat.”<sup>53</sup>

The literati also sensed a danger from missionaries that its status was being undermined by their interference in law suits and feuds. In an enthusiasm for evangelism, missionaries were often more interested in the number of converts than the quality of Christians. No doubt, a number of Chinese accepted the Christian faith with impurity — some professed conversion for material reward, others for protection from Chinese officials, and still others for evasion of certain obligations such as paying taxes and contributions. Describing frequent involvement of the missionary in litigation, Varg said: “Many a Chinese guilty of a serious or lesser crime joined the Christians in the hope of getting the missionary to protect him. Converts were always subject to petty persecution, and the criminal who had been converted would claim that he was being punished for his religious beliefs. Missionaries had a natural concern for their followers and were anxious to protect them.”<sup>54</sup> Such interference created “an *imperium in imperio* fatal to the authority of the Empire”.<sup>54a</sup> French Roman Catholic missionaries exercised a protectorate with frequency, though American Protestants were not quite free from the charge of intervention in law suits.

Trouble of this sort could very well be minimized, though not entirely prevented, should missionaries had been better trained and tolerant of the Chinese social and political institution and should provision had been made for the growth of spiritual needs. Unfortunately, the record of nineteenth century Christian missions shows that few missionaries were prepared to see problems of Christianity in a non-Christian country and of evangelism in China, in particular, until it was too late to prevent the outbreak of a violent anti-Christian movement culminated in the Boxer Rebellion of 1900.

The unbridgeable cultural difference, the opposite view of the nature of man and sin, and conflicting views of man's place in the universe presented a great barrier for effective evangelism to win China for Christ. In the last decade of the nineteenth century this unsurmountable problem compelled missionaries to evaluate their methods and goal of evangelism. Missions now aimed through institutional reform at Christianizing Chinese civilization. They were discovering that though the Chinese were heathens, they

were not without an ancient civilization that must be explored and studied. Some missionaries were beginning to appreciate fine features of Chinese civilization, realizing that western civilization was not always superior in every respect. They at last began to understand Chinese civilization and culture.

More importantly, missionaries were beginning to change the methods and objective of evangelism from the salvation of individuals through direct approach to reaching out the people through indirect methods. Evangelism shifted its emphasis calling upon each missionary to be "a preacher of the gospel of humaneness," teaching them to abandon cruel and vicious customs (foot binding, opium smoking, drinking, gambling, smoking, etc.) and helping women to become aware of human dignity.<sup>55</sup> More hospitals and schools were founded. This changing emphasis in missions reflects a change in the Church at home that had become conscious of attacking social problems. Liberal Protestantism and the social gospel movement in America emphasized the social and material rather than the spiritual needs of man. "Just as at home, so abroad also the emphasis falls less entirely than it formerly did on the individual, and is being more laid upon the society."<sup>56</sup> The altered goal and method of the missions and the improved knowledge of Chinese society made a restatement of the case for missions not only possible but also necessary.

In late nineteenth century America there had been a feeling among many evangelicals that a choice had to be made between evangelism and social concern.<sup>57</sup> The choice was made for the latter. In 1897 the publication of the Rev. James S. Dennis's work, *Christian Missions and Social Progress : A Sociological Study of Foreign Mission*, marked the beginning of the new view of missions as humanitarian agency. Dennis saw missions as a factor in the social regeneration of the world. The aims of foreign missions were "to elevate human society, modify traditional evils, and introduce reformatory ideals."<sup>58</sup> Missionaries became less and less concerned with conversion of individuals but were driven by a desire to help the Chinese acquire technology, modern medicine, education, and an understanding of Western society.

## CONCLUSION

The Christian missions had come a long way to where they were in the end of the nineteenth century. By the end of the century both Roman Catholic orders and congregations and Protestants had penetrated and established missionary stations in every province in China. There were more than 700,000 Roman Catholics in the country and a little more than 750 missionaries. Protestants had an even more phenomenal growth. Many societies now for the first time sent representatives to China in 1895 and missionaries at work numbered over 1,300 and Chinese communicants in Protestant churches reached 55,000. These figures of Protestants were an increase from about 5,700 communicants in 1869 and from about 189 missionaries in 1864.<sup>59</sup>

Though the numbers were impressive considering the enormously difficult conditions under which missionaries had to operate, they hardly achieved the primary objective for conquering China for Christ. The failure can be attributed to a number of factors. First, the intolerant early missionaries preached the Gospel with an air of superiority to the heathens in Confucian China about which they had little desire to understand. Second, their teaching against idolatry and ancestral worship seemed to threaten the Chinese family and their disapproval of the Confucian system appeared to undermine the basis of the whole Chinese social system, thus creating the hostility of the gentry class. Third, hiding behind the treaty right, missionaries penetrated into the interior often in advance of merchants and diplomats as vanguards of imperialism and demanded protection of themselves and Chinese Christians to the much annoyance of local officials.

When they realized that they had not been able to accomplish the salvation of individual souls of the Chinese masses, the attitude of Christian missionaries toward missions began to change, partly reflecting the changing role of the Church in society characteristic in the social gospel movement in the late nineteenth century. Meeting the material needs of man and eliminating ills of society became the primary objective of mission while saving individual souls turned into secondary. As a result, Christian missions changed their method of converting Chinese into the Christian

faith through Christian humanitarianism — introducing Western medicine, inaugurating education of an Occidental type, and circulating literature which familiarized Chinese with Western ideas. In these philanthropical and humanitarian activities the American Protestant missions had a remarkable success, recording an indelible mark in the history of the Protestant missions in China.

Furthermore, when the missionary movement is evaluated by the objective of the Great Commission, it is far from a failure. The Church is not expected to Christianize all nations, that is an impossible task, but the Great Commission given to the Church is to make all men aware of the Gospel. Despite the socio-religious difference, the Christian missions succeeded in making Chinese aware of the Gospel that is expressed in Love and Sacrifice for others.

Nineteenth century missions in China taught lessons for evangelical churches in America. Missionary work was infinitely more difficult and complicated than they had originally thought. It is necessary to define realistically goal and methods. Consequently, twentieth century missionaries are better prepared for the task that cannot be completed in a lifetime.

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